

# Parks and Recreation

## Introduction

Parks and recreation are integral parts of James City County's public service system. The outlook on parks and recreation has dramatically changed from the 1970s when the County contributed funding to the City of Williamsburg in order to secure access to recreational services for residents to the 1980s when pilot recreation programs were initiated by the County on a trial basis. Starting with several neighborhood parks and a modest offering of programs, the County formulated a plan of action in its 1982 Recreation Plan. Several of the recommended parks and facilities have been constructed as a result of that plan, including Upper County Park and the James City County Recreation Center.

A revised master plan was adopted in 1993 which confirmed that well-planned parks, offering a variety of recreational opportunities and quality programs for all ages and incomes, are essential for maintaining the high quality of life enjoyed by County residents. An update to this plan was adopted by the Board of Supervisors on June 9, 2009. The purpose of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan is to develop a plan of action for meeting the growing needs for active and passive parks, facilities, open space, and recreational needs of James City County citizens over the next 10 years.

The establishment of parks and recreational opportunities is vital to the creation of a sustainable and healthy community. Availability of parks and recreation programs spurs economic growth, enhances the social fabric, preserves connections to nature, protects environmental resources, and creates a sense of ownership and belonging for residents.

## Citizen Commentary

Comments collected during this update demonstrated that the County's parks and recreation services and facilities are highly valued and a benefit of living in the County. More than eight out of ten respondents (83 percent) of the 2014 Virginia Tech Citizen Survey rated James City County's existing parks and recreation facilities and services as either "good" or "excellent." This finding is similar to the responses to the same question in the 2001 and 2007 Citizen Surveys. However, 74 percent of respondents in 2014 expressed the need for additional community programs and facilities in the County. Many opinions indicated the need to focus on increasing the number of youth and family-friendly activities in the area. Specific citizen commentary related to youth and senior parks and recreation services and facilities are detailed in Population Needs. Preservation of parks while undergoing development within the County stayed a primary concern. In order of importance, 2014

Citizen Survey respondents regarded biking and walking trails (81 percent) and public access to waterways for swimming and boating (74 percent) as “very” or “somewhat important,” but were less likely to support increases to fees or taxes for these opportunities. The importance of biking and walking trails and public access to waterways increased slightly from 2007 results, which were rated as “very” or “somewhat important” by 79 percent and 72 percent of respondents respectively. A small number of attendees of the Community Workshops and participants in other input opportunities expressed that they did not favor additional bike trails.

Public input from various open-ended surveys conducted reaffirmed these results. Parks and trails were commonly cited by participants as a reason why they love James City County. Many participants were particularly interested in maintaining the existing parks and recreation facilities, preserving parks and greenspace, renovating the recreational center, and improving recreational opportunities for seniors and youth. Citizens did not express as much interest in the development of an aquatic center or a multi-use indoor sports facility for community recreation and competitive sporting events as mentioned in previous years. Many citizens also indicated that they believe parks and recreation facilities are a compatible future use for the County’s rural lands.

## **Parks and Recreation Facilities Inventory**

Today, the Parks and Recreation Department administers an annual budget of approximately \$5.3 million. A staff of 47 full-time employees oversees the department’s functions with the assistance of 12 part-time employees and 213 part-time on-call, temporary, or seasonal employees. In 2013, volunteers contributed more than 52,690 hours. The Facilities and Maintenance Division staff provides the extensive maintenance necessary to keep parks, playing fields, and open areas maintained.

The County now operates 18 parks containing 1,622 acres. These parks are categorized as mini-parks/neighborhood parks, community parks/athletic complexes, regional parks, greenways and multi-purpose trails, special use areas, blueways, and recreation centers. Descriptions are based on the guidelines of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and national benchmarking standards. More information on each category is available in the 2009 Parks and Recreation Master Plan. During fiscal year 2013, these parks and recreation centers were visited more than 2,600,000 times. Map PR-1 on the accompanying page shows the public recreation facilities in James City County.

Williamsburg-James City County Schools properties also provide recreation/athletic areas to the public. A total of eight softball fields, ten baseball fields, four soccer fields, 20 multi-use fields, 21 tennis courts, 11 basketball courts, three tracks, four nature trails, and 22 playgrounds are all accessible to the public.

In addition to its public facilities, James City County contains a wealth of private recreation facilities, including tennis courts, golf courses, trails, and swimming pools within many of its neighborhoods. The development of these amenities is designed to and does in fact relieve

some pressure for County provision of public facilities. It is important to acknowledge the positive contribution these facilities make to overall community quality of life and how they help make amenities accessible to individuals, reducing vehicle miles traveled. While these facilities provide invaluable services and should be promoted, the goal of the County is to provide a quality park system with facilities available to all citizens.

Map PR-1: James City County Parks and Recreation Facilities



The adjacent localities of the City of Williamsburg, the City of Newport News, and York County offer many recreational opportunities which are available for shared use with James City County residents (Waller Mill Park, for example, is located in the City of Williamsburg). Since many facilities are open to users living in any jurisdiction, it is important to provide sidewalk, bikeway, and greenway connections across locality borders to provide access to the facilities.

Several State and Federally operated park facilities are also located within to the County, such as York River State Park, the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail (blueway), and portions of the Colonial National Historical Park, which includes Historic Jamestowne. These continue to offer excellent recreational facilities, including boating, bicycling, hiking, passive recreation, and sightseeing.

## Programming

The Parks and Recreation Department currently offers more than 2,900 programs and special events annually in active and passive recreation for all ages and abilities. Citizens participate in year-round opportunities in recreational, instructional and educational programs in areas of sports and athletics, fitness, health and wellness, aquatics, the arts, special events, outdoor education and adventure, historical interpretation, neighborhood and outreach, leadership and development, before and after school programs and summer camps. The Parks and Recreation Department also offers several other specialized services. One example is the Inclusion and Therapeutic Recreation Services, which provides accommodations and accessibility to persons with disabilities for participation in recreational programs, facilities, and leisure activities offered to the community. As with many of the facilities operated by the County, the Parks and Recreation Department continually seeks creative partnerships with public, private and non-profit providers and adjacent localities to meet some programming needs and maximize opportunities to citizens.

As the County's population changes, both the types of programs that are in demand and the barriers to serving the youth, senior and lower-income populations change as well. As noted in the Population Needs section, it continues to be important for the Parks and Recreation Department to be flexible in revising the programs offered to meet the changing needs of the population.

## Greenways

Walking for pleasure continues to be the number one recreational activity in the United States, and according to the 2011 Virginia Outdoors Plan, citizens in Hampton Roads feel that trails for hiking, walking, and bicycling are the most needed outdoor recreation opportunities. Planning for greenways can help provide these types of facilities.

Greenways are linear open spaces that are managed for conservation, recreation, and/or alternative transportation uses. Most are networks of natural open space corridors that connect neighborhoods, parks, and schools to areas of natural, cultural, recreational, scenic, and historical significance.

Recognizing the importance of greenways, the Board of Supervisors adopted the Greenway Master Plan in 2002. The Greenway Master Plan establishes a framework for a County-wide system of interconnected greenways and trails with the goal of balancing environmental protection with the need for recreational amenities. Elements pertaining to greenway planning and design, maintenance and management, and implementation strategies and funding are also included in the plan. The plan should become part of a broader green infrastructure plan, which would identify a network of parks or conservation areas connected by linear greenway corridors.

While this technique is often seen as a way to protect environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife corridors, green infrastructure planning can contribute significant opportunities for outdoor recreation.

## **Blueways and Shoreline Recreation**

According to the 2011 Virginia Outdoors Survey, more than half of the respondents thought that the most needed outdoor recreational opportunities included public access to water for, fishing, swimming, and beach use. Not only does water access provide for excellent recreational opportunities, the personal interaction with local rivers that feed into the Chesapeake Bay can also help residents become aware of the connection between the value of the Bay and individual interests in protecting it.

There are currently 11 private and 10 public water access facilities. More detail is available in Tables PR-1 and PR-2 and Map PR-2. Numerous private developments also allow property owners to maintain docks and piers on their lots.

## **Recreation Needs**

Several techniques are used to identify the County's recreational needs, including inventorying existing public facilities, analyzing population trends, and collecting public input. Facility standards are guidelines that define service areas based on population and can change over time as the demographics change. The County's parks and recreation facility standards were re-evaluated during the 2009 Parks and Recreation Master Plan update. The Master Plan sets a guide of 12 acres of public recreation space for every 1,000 County residents. The 12 acres should consist of approximately three acres of community park, five acres of regional park, two acres of linear parks/greenways, and two acres of special use areas. Readers should consult the current Master Plan for additional facilities and the most recent standards.

In comparison to NRPA standards, James City County calls for slightly higher facility/population ratios for regional open space, special use areas, bikeways, youth competitive softball fields, and multi-purpose fields based on community demand, high program participation, and citizen interest to preserve open space for conservation and recreational purposes. County standards are slightly lower than the NRPA standards for some facilities due to decreased demand and the observation that many private gyms, developments, and adjacent localities tend to provide these facilities. More specific detail about the facility classifications and standards is available in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.



Table PR-1: Private Water Access Areas

	Water Body	Parking	Boat Launch Ramp	Wet Slips	Dockside Pumpout Station	Restrooms	Private Resident Docks
Kingsmill Marina	James River	X	X	X	X	X	X
The Marina at Two Rivers (Governor's Land)	James River	X	X	X		X	
Chickahominy Marina	Chickahominy River	X	X	X		X	
Chickahominy Haven	Chickahominy River	X	X				X
Riverview Plantation	York River	X	X				X
First Colony	James River	X	X	X			X
Jamestown 4-H Educational Center	James River	X	X			X	
Stonehouse Marina*	York River	X	X				
Powhatan Shores	Powhatan Creek	X	X				X
Kingspoint	Powhatan Creek	X	X				
Jamestown Marina	Powhatan Creek	X	X	X		X	

\*Stonehouse Marina is a proposed facility. Guarantees for water access provided by proffers.

Sources: James City County Comprehensive Plan Shoreline and Ground Water Element, James City County Parks and Recreation, James City County Geographic Information System, 2007 aerial photography, and site visits.

Table PR-2: Public Water Access Areas

	Water Body	Day Use	Seasonal Use	Fee or Permit to Launch	Parking	Boat Launch Ramp	Wet Slips	Dockside Pumpout Station	Fishing	Swimming Beach	Hiking	Camping	Picnicking	Restrooms	Handicap Access	Cultural Resources
Colonial National Historical Park (Jamestowne Island) and Parkway	James River	X			X				X	X#	X		X	X		X
Croaker Landing - York River State	York River	X		X	X	X			X		X				X**	
Diascund Reservoir Park	Diascund Reservoir	X			X	X*			X						X	
Little Creek Reservoir Park	Little Creek Reservoir	X	X	X	X	X*			X		X		X	X	X	
Jamestown Campground	James River	X			X				X	X			X			X
Powhatan Creek Park	Powhatan Creek	X			X	X*			X						X	X
Brickyard Landing Park	Chickahominy River	X			X	X										
York River State Park - Taskinas Creek National Estuarine Research Reserve	York River/ Taskinas	X			X	X*					X		X	X	X**	
Chickahominy Riverfront Park	Chickahominy River	X		X	X	X			X	X		X	X	X	X	
Jamestown Yacht Basin and Marina	James River	X		X	X	X	X	X						X	X	
Stonehouse Canoe Launches (2)***	Ware Creek	X				X*										

# Swimming is permitted at College Creek and Archer's Hope; however, it is strongly discouraged due to dangerous currents (Mike Litterst, National Park Service)

\* Launch restricted to non-motorized boats \*\* Portions of park are handicap accessible: [http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state\\_parks/yor.shtml](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/yor.shtml).

\*\*\* Two proposed public launch facilities. Guarantees for water access provided by proffers.

Sources: The Chesapeake Bay Program, James City County Comprehensive Plan Shoreline and Ground Water Element, Engineering and Resource Protection Division, Parks and Recreation Department, and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

Map PR-2: Public and Private Water Access Areas





Population projections have been used to create equity maps, which visually represent the areas of the County that are served by existing recreational facilities based on the facility service standards. These maps and standards help the Parks and Recreation Department locate where services are available, how equitable the service delivery is across the County, and where land should be acquired for the construction of new parks or facilities. The most underserved areas for several types of facilities are in the north (Stonehouse District) and south (Roberts District).

## Action Plan

The adopted Parks and Recreation Master Plan sets out the specific actions the County will take to meet its projected recreation needs and is expressed in terms of specific goals, strategies, and tactics, as well as a list of future capital improvements.

In order to offset the cost for the construction and operation of new facilities, the County's Parks and Recreation Department continues to explore revenue-generating programs and facilities and seek additional funding through alternative sources. The adopted Parks and Recreation Master Plan also contains proffer guidelines that are used by the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors to address provision of neighborhood recreational facilities when considering special use permit (SUP) and rezoning applications.

## Spotlight on Successes and Opportunities

Meeting a diverse community's parks and recreation needs requires generous access to parks and safe and healthy playgrounds and recreation facilities for its residents as well as providing opportunities for neighbors to connect.

Directly resulting from the 2009 Comprehensive Plan, the County has made significant progress toward providing a range of recreational facilities and activities that meet diverse needs and promote healthy, social lifestyles. The Parks and Recreation Department has continued to move forward to develop active recreational facilities at several County parks based on the approved master plans. Major improvements were made at Mid County Park, including a new office building and the replacement of Kidsburg. Lighting was added at two high school athletic fields, as well as the basketball courts at Warhill Sports Complex. Paving and accessibility improvements were made to the multiuse trail at Freedom Park, and the Freedom Park Interpretive Center was completed. Campsites at Chickahominy Riverfront Park were renovated to allow for full hook up of RV's. Jamestown Beach Park also underwent extensive shoreline restoration. The 2.05 mile Powhatan Creek Trail was completed, and a seasonal synthetic ice rink was established at New Town. In addition, contractual agreements were reached for the operation of Jamestown Marina, Little Creek Reservoir, and the Boathouse Facility at Chickahominy Riverfront Park, and additional recreation opportunities were established through program contracts for private providers including Eco Discovery Park and Go Ape Treetop Adventure.

As a result of the County's commitment to providing outstanding recreation opportunities, James City County was awarded the 2012 Gold Medal Award, which recognizes the best managed park and recreation systems in the nation. This award is presented by the NRPA and the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration and honors communities throughout the United States that demonstrate excellence in long-range planning, resource management, volunteerism, environmental stewardship, program development, professional development, and agency recognition.

In order to continue to reap the benefits that parks and recreation have to offer, the County should continue to support both the maintenance of existing facilities and development of new facilities. Significant opportunities, partnerships, and amenities are already provided, but as County demographics change and growth continues, it becomes increasingly important to plan the location for amenities, connections to neighborhoods, and explore alternative funding and partnership strategies.

The following goals, strategies, and actions, in addition to the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Strategy Matrix, serve the desire of residents to maintain a high-quality community through the provision of a wide variety of indoor, outdoor, active, and passive recreation opportunities.

## Goals, Strategies, and Actions

### Goal

**PR – Provide a range of recreational facilities and activities that are affordable, accessible, appropriate, and adequate in number, size, type, and location to accommodate the needs of all County residents and that promote personal growth, social development, and healthy lifestyles.**

### Strategies and Actions

**PR 1 – Match public facilities and programs with citizen needs for recreation and open space.**

- PR 1.1 – Implement the specific strategies and tactics approved in the 2009 James City County Parks and Recreation Master Plan Strategy Matrix.
- PR 1.2 – Prioritize potential property acquisition for parks in underserved areas of the County.
- PR 1.3 – Continue to develop Freedom Park and the Warhill Sports Complex based upon approved master plans as funds become available.
- PR 1.4 – Update and develop master plans for County-owned parks to coordinate construction phasing and validate capital improvement requests.
- PR 1.5 – Continue to plan and develop a park with open space areas on the 13-acre water tower parcel next to the James City County Recreation Center.
- PR 1.6 – Develop parks and fields in conjunction with new school development whenever possible and continue to collaborate with Williamsburg-James City County Schools during the site design process.

**PR 2 – Continue to develop an integrated network of linear parks, trails, bikeways, sidewalks, and greenways with connections to a regional greenway system that allow foot or bike access to destinations and that preserve the diverse natural, cultural, scenic, and environmental resources of the community that contribute to recreation activities.**

- PR 2.1 – Continue to coordinate with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), the Historic Triangle Bicycle Advisory Committee, and local running, hiking, and bicycling clubs to develop a bikeway network consistent with the adopted Regional Bikeways Map and support the public provision of bicycle facilities by seeking County funding whenever feasible and by seeking non-County funding sources.
- PR 2.2 – Incorporate bikeway design standards from the Greenway Master Plan into the County's Zoning Ordinance. These design standards should address not only cross sections and surface materials, but also signage, support facilities (such as bike racks, benches, trash receptacles, etc.) and road crossing safety measures.
- PR 2.3 – Update the Greenway Master Plan and develop a new strategic Action Plan based on the current needs, conditions, objectives, and funding resources in order to continue to improve bike and pedestrian connectivity in the community.
  - PR 2.3.1 – Continue to seek funding in the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) for the acquisition and use of open space areas and greenways to preserve the scenic, natural, and historic character of the area.
  - PR 2.3.2 – Collaborate with adjacent localities, developers and other interested organizations to align and integrate plans.
- PR 2.4 – Continue to collaborate regionally to improve connectivity of open space, including but not limited to working with Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRPDC) and County staff to develop a local level green infrastructure map which identifies critical natural, cultural, and recreational networks and develop a plan for implementation. Build upon the open space diagram in the Greenway Master Plan.
- PR 2.5 – Work with the National Park Service to realize the recreational and cultural potential of Green Spring Plantation, including evaluation of a multi-use trail on Centerville Road between Monticello Avenue and John Tyler Highway (Route 5).

**PR 3 – Research and pursue alternative methods for funding park development and recreation programs that create a positive cash flow to offset expenditures, including private sector partnerships, establishment of a park foundation, citizen volunteers, grants, and revenue producing facilities.**

- PR 3.1 – Reinstitute the grant-in-aid program, if financially feasible, for neighborhood associations and other non-profit groups to make funds available for neighborhood park improvements.
- PR 3.2 – Coordinate Purchase of Development Rights, greenway, greenspace, community character, and environmental protection programs to maximize utility of shared resources, funding, and criteria necessary for site selection and land protection.
- PR 3.3 – Submit grant applications to secure funds for new parks and recreation programs, services, facilities, and related transportation services.
- PR 3.4 – Emphasize the maintenance of existing facilities as a way to make efficient use of limited financial and physical resources.

**PR 4 – Continue to provide access to major water bodies for expansion of water recreation opportunities.**

- PR 4.1 – Seek additional waterfront access on the James, York, and Chickahominy rivers to improve and expand water access and blueway trail development, especially in areas currently lacking water access, such as the lower James River.
- PR 4.2 – Develop recreational components of the Jamestown Beach Campground, Jamestown Yacht Basin, and Chickahominy Riverfront Park in accordance with approved master plans.
- PR 4.3 – Collaborate with the National Park Service to continue to provide trail information at designated Chesapeake Bay Gateways and for the Captain John Smith water trail.

**PR 5 – Collaborate with developers of all new developments to provide neighborhood park facilities, sidewalks, bikeways, and trails as outlined in the Parks and Recreation, Greenway, and Sidewalk master plans and to permanently protect open space and natural resources.**

- PR 5.1 – Continue to encourage new developments to dedicate or otherwise permanently convey open space, greenway, and conservation areas to the County or a public land trust.
- PR 5.2 – Encourage new developments to dedicate right-of-way and construct sidewalks, bikeways, and greenway trails for transportation and recreation purposes, and construct such facilities concurrent with road improvements and other public projects in accordance with the Pedestrian Accommodation Master Plan, the Regional Bikeways Map, and the Greenway Master Plan.
- PR 5.3 – Encourage new developments requiring legislative review to proffer public recreation facilities consistent with standards in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. New developments should have neighborhood parks with trails, bikeways, playgrounds, practice fields, and open spaces.
- PR 5.4 – Maintain a comprehensive inventory of privately owned recreation facilities within the County and apply a percentage of these facilities towards meeting the overall Parks and Recreation Facility and Service Standards.
- PR 5.5 – Amend Zoning Ordinance regulations to facilitate development of recreational facilities, including but not limited to neighborhood parks, playgrounds, sport courts, fields, and trails within by-right residential developments in accordance with design standards as enabled by the Code of Virginia.

**PR 6 – Incorporate the particular needs of the County’s diverse population, including but not limited to teens, at-risk youth, seniors, and persons with disabilities when planning for recreational facilities, programs, and greenways.**

- PR 6.1 – Include input from teens, at-risk youth, seniors, and persons with disabilities in all master plans for new parks.
- PR 6.2 – Re-evaluate the types of programs offered based on changing County demographics and citizen needs.
- PR 6.3 – Continue to offer the Inclusion service and conduct assessments with persons with disabilities to ensure necessary accessibility for participation in recreation programs.
- PR 6.4 – Establish program performance measures (including goals, objectives, essential eligibility guidelines) to incorporate consistent standards in program design.

- PR 6.5 – Incorporate leadership and volunteerism in teen programs in an effort to increase skill building and employability within the County.
- PR 6.6 – Include programs and services that build resiliency in at-risk youth and their families.

**PR 7 – Address issues of affordability and accessibility in planning recreation programs.**

- PR 7.1 – Work with Williamsburg Area Transit Authority to improve the public transportation service to County parks and facilities.
- PR 7.2 – Plan for multiple points of access for vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists to improve connectivity between Parks and Recreation Department facilities and surrounding neighborhoods.
- PR 7.3 – Re-evaluate and continue to provide financial assistance to families and individuals who are most in need for essential programs (such as the before and after school program) and continue to offer free access times at County recreation centers.
- PR 7.4 – Conduct a comparative market analysis to review fees bi-annually, to ensure that programs are offered at fair market value.
- PR 7.5 – Identify potential partnerships with neighborhoods to develop neighborhood programming.

**PR 8 – Support programs that promote healthy lifestyles, such as fitness, aerobics, and wellness education, and that emphasize conservation and environmental awareness.**

- PR 8.1 – Enhance the partnerships with Williamsburg-James City County Schools to offer joint programming for health and wellness.
- PR 8.2 – Develop a plan to incorporate health and wellness components into program areas.

**PR 9 – Continue to promote awareness of the recreational opportunities available to County residents and visitors.**

- PR 9.1 – Continue to disseminate brochures and keep up to date information on the website to inform County residents and visitors about County parks and recreational opportunities in accordance with approved public information plans.
- PR 9.2 – Provide information at community events regarding Parks and Recreation Department programs and services.

**PR 10 – Sponsor educational opportunities that emphasize the connections between parks and recreation and environmental and historical preservation.**

- PR 10.1 – Enhance existing facilities and marketing efforts to fully promote an ecotourism program that promotes passive recreational opportunities within natural open spaces and special environmental and historical areas and identify and designate lands in support of this purpose.
- PR 10.2 – Continue to promote signage and programs that provide educational opportunities in cultural and natural resources. Develop public historical interpretive sites at County facilities in keeping with the County’s Archaeological Policy.



**PR 11 – Design, construct, and operate facilities in a sustainable manner.**

- PR 11.1 – Develop sustainable strategies similar to LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) for the design and location of parks and incorporate the strategies into park development guidelines, where feasible.